

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF IOWA
CEDAR RAPIDS DIVISION**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

vs.

RICARDO WATKINS,

Defendant.

No. CR99-0073-LRR

**ORDER REGARDING MOTION
FOR SENTENCE REDUCTION
PURSUANT TO
18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2)**

This matter comes before the court on its own motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2).¹

The United States Sentencing Commission recently revised the United States Sentencing Guidelines (“USSG”) applicable to drug trafficking offenses by changing how the base offense levels in the drug quantity tables incorporate the statutory mandatory minimum penalties for such offenses. Specifically, Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) generally reduces by two levels the offense levels assigned to the quantities that trigger the statutory mandatory minimum penalties in USSG §2D1.1 and made parallel changes to USSG §2D1.11. Because Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) alters

¹ In light of the record, the court concludes that it need not appoint counsel or conduct a hearing. *See United States v. Harris*, 568 F.3d 666, 669 (8th Cir. 2009) (concluding that there is no right to assistance of counsel when pursuing relief under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c) and finding that a judge need not hold a hearing on a motion pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)); *see also United States v. Burrell*, 622 F.3d 961, 966 (8th Cir. 2010) (clarifying that “[a]ll that is required is enough explanation of the court’s reasoning to allow for meaningful appellate review”); Fed. R. Crim. P. 43(b)(4) (stating that a defendant’s presence is not required in a proceeding that involves the reduction of a sentence under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)).

the threshold amounts in the drug quantity tables in USSG §2D1.1 and USSG §2D1.11, many, but not all, drug quantities will have a base offense level that is two levels lower than before Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)).

The court is statutorily precluded from applying a federal sentencing guideline amendment retroactively unless the United States Sentencing Commission designates an amendment for retroactive application. In relevant part, 18 U.S.C. § 3582 provides:

The court may not modify a term of imprisonment once it has been imposed except that . . . in the case of a defendant who has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment based on a sentencing range that has subsequently been lowered by the Sentencing Commission pursuant to 28 U.S.C. [§] 994(o), upon motion of the defendant or the Director of the Bureau of Prisons, or on its own motion, the court may reduce the term of imprisonment, after considering the factors set forth in [18 U.S.C. §] 3553(a) to the extent that they are applicable, if such a reduction is consistent with applicable policy statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.

18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2); *see also Dillon v. United States*, 560 U.S. 817, 826 (2010) (“Section 3582(c)(2)’s text, together with its narrow scope, shows that Congress intended to authorize only a limited adjustment to an otherwise final sentence and not a plenary resentencing proceeding.”); *United States v. Auman*, 8 F.3d 1268, 1271 (8th Cir. 1993) (“Section 3582(c)(2) is a provision that permits a district court to reduce a term of imprisonment if the sentencing range upon which the term was based is subsequently lowered by the Sentencing Commission.”).

The United States Sentencing Commission promulgated USSG §1.B1.10 to implement 28 U.S.C. § 994(u) and to provide guidance to a court when considering a motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). In relevant part, USSG §1B1.10 states:

In a case in which a defendant is serving a term of imprisonment, and the guideline range applicable to that defendant has subsequently been lowered as a result of an amendment to the Guidelines Manual listed in subsection (d)

below, the court may reduce the defendant's term of imprisonment as provided by 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). As required by 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2), any such reduction in the defendant's term of imprisonment shall be consistent with this policy statement.

USSG §1B1.10(a)(1); *see also* USSG §1B1.10, comment. (n.1) (“Eligibility for consideration under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) is triggered only by an amendment listed in subsection (d) that lowers the applicable guideline range . . .”). In addition to specifying which federal sentencing guidelines may be retroactively applied, USSG §1B1.10 guides the court as to the amount by which a sentence may be reduced under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). *See* USSG §1B1.10(b)(1).

On July 18, 2014, the United States Sentencing Commission unanimously voted to apply Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) retroactively to most drug trafficking offenses, and it set November 1, 2014 as the date that Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) would go into effect. Stated differently, Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) is included within subsection (d) of USSG §1B1.10. Consequently, under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and USSG §1B1.10, the court may rely on Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) to reduce a defendant’s sentence. But, even if Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) is applicable, a special limiting instruction applies: “The court shall not order a reduced term of imprisonment based on Amendment 782 unless the effective date of the court’s order is November 1, 2015, or later.” USSG §1B1.10(e)(1); *see also* Amendment 788 (amending USSG §1B1.10).

Here, the court is unable to rely on Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) to reduce the defendant’s sentence under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and USSG §1B1.10. *See generally* *United States v. Curry*, 584 F.3d 1102, 1104 (8th Cir. 2009) (discussing *United States v. Wyatt*, 115 F.3d 606, 608-09 (8th Cir. 1997)) (explaining requirements under USSG §1B1.10(b)). Previously, the court relied on 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and USSG §1B1.10 to reduce the defendant’s sentence to 360 months imprisonment. Before doing

so, the court determined that an amended guideline range of 360 months imprisonment to life imprisonment applied to the defendant based on a total amended adjusted offense level of 42 and a criminal history category of III. Amendment 782 (subject to subsection (e)(1)) does not have the effect of lowering the defendant's guideline range. The defendant still faces a guideline range of 360 months imprisonment to life imprisonment based on a total amended adjusted offense level of 40 and a criminal history category of III. Because the applicable guideline range remains the same, the defendant is not entitled to a reduction of his sentence. *See USSG §1B1.10(a)(2)(B)* ("A reduction . . . is not authorized under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) if . . . an amendment listed in subsection (c) does not have the effect of lowering the defendant's applicable guideline range."); *USSG §1B1.10*, comment. (n.1) (making clear that a reduction is not authorized under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) if an amendment in subsection (c) is applicable to the defendant but the amendment does not have the effect of lowering the defendant's applicable guideline range); *see also United States v. Roa-Medina*, 607 F.3d 255, 260-61 (1st Cir. 2010) (holding that a sentence reduction under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) was not available because the amendment does not have the effect of lowering the defendant's applicable guideline range); *United States v. Spells*, 322 F. App'x 171, 173 (3d Cir. 2009) (rejecting the argument that a decrease in the base offense level gave the district court authority to reduce a sentence when there was no change in the applicable sentencing range); *United States v. Lindsey*, 556 F.3d 238, 242-46 (4th Cir. 2009) (concluding that the defendant could not rely on 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) because the amendment does not have the effect of lowering the applicable guideline range); *United States v. Caraballo*, 552 F.3d 6, 10-12 (1st Cir. 2008) (holding that a defendant must establish that an amended guideline has the effect of lowering the sentencing range actually used at his or her sentencing in order to engage the gears of 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2)); *United States v. Wanton*, 525 F.3d 621, 622 (8th Cir. 2008) (summarily affirming district court's denial of relief because "[the] guideline range would

not be lowered, and [the] original sentence is unaffected by the amendments"); *United States v. McFadden*, 523 F.3d 839, 840-41 (8th Cir. 2008) (concluding that, unless the applicable sentencing range changes, a reduction in the base offense level does not allow for a sentence reduction); *United States v. Gonzalez-Balderas*, 105 F.3d 981, 984 (5th Cir. 1997) (finding that, although the amendment did lower the defendant's offense level, the district court did not err when it summarily denied the defendant's motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) because the amended guideline range remained the same).

Accordingly, the court concludes that a reduction under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) and USSG §1B1.10 is not justified. The clerk's office is directed to send a copy of this order to the defendant, the office of the Federal Public Defender, the office of the United States Attorney and the office of United States Probation.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

DATED this 5th day of March, 2015.



LINDA R. READE
CHIEF JUDGE, U.S. DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF IOWA